HABS No. Md-399

HABS
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95-

Residence Row
4-18 West Hamilton Street
(Brick Houses)
~~West Hamilton Street~~
Baltimore
Baltimore City County
Maryland

Photographs

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

ADDENDUM TO:
RESIDENCE ROW (BRICK HOUSES)
8-18 West Hamilton Street
Baltimore
Independent City
Maryland

HABS MD-399
MD,4-BALT,95-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADDENDUM TO
RESIDENCE ROW
(Brick Houses)

HABS No. MD–399

LOCATION: 10–18 W. Hamilton Street, north side, Baltimore (Independent City), Maryland.[1]

SIGNIFICANCE:

Nos. 10–18 W. Hamilton Street convey the scale and articulation of upper-end row housing available in Baltimore during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Designed by prolific local architect-builder Robert Cary Long, Sr., patriarch of a Baltimore architectural dynasty, they are an important remainder of his work in the city. Bearing a two-room-deep plan with central stair and a spatial organization placing the primary living areas on the *piano nobile*—one floor above the ground-floor entry—they are an early example of a domestic space arrangement frequently seen in more expensive nineteenth-century Baltimorean houses. In terms of contemporary architectural expression, their simple, almost severe planar articulation and tripartite double-hung windows reference neoclassical design influences as they developed in the United States early in the nineteenth century.[2]

HISTORIAN: James A. Jacobs.

DESCRIPTION:

Located on the north side of W. Hamilton Street between Cathedral and Charles streets, the five attached houses on the interior of this unit block have been subject to varying degrees of change. No. 10 stands as the most dramatically altered with a full fourth story and complete reconstruction of the south (main) façade occurring sometime in the nineteenth century. Only the ground-floor door and window openings suggest the façade's former state; the upper stories are presently arranged in two bays. Of the remaining rows, No. 14 also bears readily discernable alterations—the tripartite windows on the first and second stories was removed in the nineteenth century and windows arranged in three bays inserted in their place. The long marble lintels of the tripartite windows remain extant over the

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[1]As documented by HABS with two photographs in 1936, what was termed "Residence Row" included the structure located at No. 8 W. Hamilton Street, on the northwest corner of Hamilton and Morton streets. The early HABS documentation captures a building at No. 8 that, despite extensive alterations, was clearly built part of the construction campaign creating Nos. 10–18. In this report No. 8 will not be not be discussed in reference to the rest of the row on account of the building's nearly total reconstruction sometime after the 1936 photograph was taken.

[2]For additional information related to row houses and urban townhouses in Baltimore see the reports for the Decatur Miller House, HABS No. MD–1175; 18–28 E. Mount Vernon Place, HABS No. MD–1176; Belvidere Terrace, HABS No. MD–1177; and the Graham-Hughes House, HABS No. MD–1178.

center window openings. The third-floor dormer facing W. Hamilton Street has also been replaced in No. 14 and the former dwelling—now housing a club and rental apartment—has received a substantial addition to the north (rear).

On the exterior Nos. 12, 16, and 18 better convey the form and detail originally discernible in all of the houses. Each unit encompasses three-and-one-half stories. The walls of the three lower stories are laid-up on the south façade in Flemish bond. The window lintels and sills, stringcourse, and door threshold are of simply worked white marble. The ground floor is arranged in three bays and visually separated from the rest of the façade by means of a stringcourse extending across the entire wall at lintel level. The door is justified to the left with comparatively small windows positioned in the center and right bays. Two narrow sidelights containing four fixed panes with solid recessed panels located below flank each of the front doors; the doors are separated from the sidelights by thin extruded "jambs" faintly suggesting the Doric order. The first and second stories each contain a single, centered tripartite window bearing a large double-hung unit flanked by two narrow double-hung units. All of the windows are accented by shutters of varying types. A small front-facing dormer is centered on the third floor's half story. Bulkhead cellar doors opening from the sidewalk are located in the center bay, and a window recessed in a well is positioned in the right-hand bay at ground level.

Of the five houses, No. 18 appears to have experienced the least amount of change. The north wall contains brick courses alternating a row of headers with five rows of stretchers. The grade of the rear garden is lower than that at the front. As a result of this situation on the north the "ground floor" is raised above ground level and three comparatively large windows light the cellar's rear room. The ground-floor door and window openings mirror those on the street façade. On the first story, a tripartite window is present at center, with a smaller window of a later epoch located adjacent. The cellar, ground, and first-floor windows are all topped by brick jack arches. While it is possible that a tripartite window was originally positioned at the rear of the second story—as in the front—No. 18 possesses two double-hung windows positioned over the outside bays with a large expanse of blank wall at center. One dormer, identical to that on the south front of the house, provides additional light for the third half-story.

As constructed and still clearly readable in No. 18, each floor contains two rooms—one facing front and one facing rear—separated by constricted circulation space at center. The attic half-story is a single open room. The ground-floor entry opens onto a vestibule separated from a passage extending back to the stair by a doorway and flanking sidelights identical to those present on the exterior.[3] Toward the rear of this passage, a door opens onto the front room on the right. This room is smaller than corresponding ones on the first and second floors due to the presence of the entry vestibule and passage. A single large room extends across the back of the house; its principal entry is located under the stair in a jog of entry passage. This room contains the stair to the basement as well as a folding door providing access to the rear garden. From the entry passage, a small but well-proportioned

[3]Given that the house was designed with the primary rooms located one level above the house's entry, this street level will be referred to as the "ground floor." The upper stories will be numbered sequentially with the "first floor" referring to the story above the ground floor, and so on.

stair winds upward 90° to the right with no landing. At the base of the stair, just beyond the door to the front room, a shallow arch springs across the entry hall, which otherwise has a flat ceiling. This feature appears to be original as it is discernible in other units of the row. On the first floor, a square circulation passage separates the front and rear rooms. The passage contains a closet, also located between the rooms. The rear room has been divided into two spaces, one containing a small kitchen. From this level the stair rises in a tight half winder to the second floor, which contains a large room at the front and two smaller rooms at the rear. As on the floor below, the rear rooms were likely a single space in the original configuration. The stair continues up to a single room on the third (half) story.

Each of the (original) six principal spaces contains a fireplace centered on the east wall. Extant fireplace surrounds indicate that even in the most important rooms on the first floor, their construction and carving remained relatively restrained, if not severe. The standard interior architrave molding is a simple symmetrical arrangement of two thin semicircular bands. On the first floor, though still simple, the molding is more prominent with a wide unarticulated band set-off by semicircular molding at the door opening and around the band's outer edge. The standard door used for both the interior and the exterior is a six-panel "cross-and-bible" type, of which a number—for example, the rear exterior door and doors into the first-floor rooms—are hinged at their centers.

The interior's most interesting feature is the stair balustrade. Except for the newel at the bottom, which has a comparatively more complex profile of turned undulations, each point where the stair is redirected is marked by a simple Tuscan column. The interstices between the newel posts are filled with thin square balusters. Although physically attached to each of the balusters, from the turn of the stair between the first and second floors down to the entry passage's newel post, the rounded handrail elegantly "drips" downward without a break, seemingly floating on top of the balusters and newels. Particularly intriguing is the manner in which the rail turns at right angles on the flat top of the Tuscan newel posts. One idiosyncrasy of the balustrade is its inability to continue unbroken from the first to the second floor. The tight nature of the winder and the railing's angle required an awkward solution whereby a Tuscan newel is raised quite high up on a base. The railing from the first story terminates at the base, while the rail up to the second story springs from a square block located at the top of the tall newel.

HISTORY:

The Design and Form of Attached Urban Houses[4]

Nearly all of the major American cities thriving in the nineteenth century contain neighborhoods predominantly identified by blocks of contiguous or closely-spaced detached and/or semi-detached houses. While the cities along the eastern seaboard from the Chesapeake to Cape Cod—in particular—saw the creation of vast, low-density

[4]Much of the information in this section is distilled from research conducted as part of HABS projects concentrating on speculative row housing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia was held as a national model in the nineteenth century for devising a housing system lower-density, single-family dwelling units (as opposed to New York's "tenement" model). Baltimore relied on a similar single-family system and, accordingly, the landscapes of both cities are remarkably similar in scale, form, and in many cases, detail.

neighborhoods by the century's end, Baltimore is among the best recognized for the pervasiveness of the row house form and its steadfast adherence to this form well into the twentieth century. If Baltimore's singularity in these terms has been somewhat overstated—Philadelphia, for example, also relied upon row housing for all tiers of society for a duration similar to that in Baltimore—that the city's expansion and character is largely founded upon blocks of attached dwellings cannot be overemphasized.

Similar to other cities, Baltimore's full turn toward row housing as a residential form occurred in the first decades of the nineteenth century as its population rapidly expanded. Baltimore's rising importance as a shipping, production, and mercantile center made it a logical destination point for arriving immigrants. At a time when a city's physical expansion was still restricted by walking distances, row houses were as much a necessity as an economical and efficient solution to mass housing. Even after horse and streetcars made more remote areas of the city open for development, their fixed tracks required that expansion still continue on relatively dense patterns.

The necessity of row houses accepted, their form could be easily modified in terms of size and appointment, thus appealing and salable to essentially the entire socioeconomic spectrum. Upper-end attached single-family houses and whole rows were often the work of commissioned architects; however, the bulk of nineteenth-century dwellings constructed in Baltimore and elsewhere was raised by speculative builders. These operators developed projects for attached houses by merging local design precedents and building methods with the latest domestic technologies and fashionable forms of expression. Despite the fact that thousands of individual builders and developers were involved in the creation of nineteenth-century residential districts, the general reliance on local prototypes for plans and elevations led to a remarkable cohesiveness within and among districts.

Specific needs of the nineteenth century city led to limitations in the design of row houses. Their attached nature eliminated exterior exposure along two walls, except in corner units. High-density residency requirements caused the subdivision of blocks into deep and narrow lots, with the average house footprint similarly constricted. Whether taking into account low-end or high-end dwellings, two basic room arrangements predominated throughout the nineteenth century and dictated by the need for adequate light and ventilation. The most basic form was a two-cell deep plan giving each room a full exterior wall for placement of doors and/or windows. In this plan, the stair might rise in a tight winder at the center between the two rooms, or in a straight or broken run up from a side circulation passage. Generally, public rooms occupied the same story as the entrance, although designs employing a *piano nobile* were frequently seen in both speculative and architect-commissioned urban houses throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in the higher price ranges. Semi-private and private chambers were positioned on the upper floors. Service spaces, for example kitchens, were either relegated to the cellar, to a rear outbuilding, or both.

A second prevalent plan arrangement allowed for more than two rooms to a floor through use of a setback wing attached to the house's rear. The setback provided enough exterior exposure for the insertion of a window in the middle room. The "front building" generally contained two rooms, a circulation passage, and the principal or only stair. The narrower "back building" or "ell" contained varying numbers of rooms, some public like the dining

room, depending on its length. The ell often housed lower status and/or service spaces, its own vertical circulation, and a separate entrance usually opening onto a vestibule located between the front and back buildings. In some cases, the kitchen was located in the cellar or in its own rear outbuilding. Although variations on this configuration occurred—for example a three-room deep plan with no ell whereby the center room received filtered light from the stairwell skylight—the two-room deep and two-rooms-plus-ell were most prominent in Baltimore and other American cities throughout the nineteenth century.[5]

Given the restrictions inherent to arranging rooms in row houses it is not surprising that only a few standard floor plans were developed and used with minor variations throughout the century. While these generic plans more-or-less remained static over time, the street face of row houses was in constant flux, reflecting whatever aesthetic expression was in vogue. Sometimes row-house elevations were conceived as part of a block-long ensemble whereby individual facades contributed to an overall, usually symmetrical, composition. At other times alternating elevations were used within the same block for variety. The most simple, economical, and commonly seen manner in which row houses facades were conceived was in long chains of identical or mirrored units. While sometimes accepted as "dignified" when considered as a group, this approach to row house planning also gave rise to later criticisms of "monotony" in urban residential districts. Given the somewhat erratic ownership patterns of land parcels, groups of attached houses built at different times and often reflecting wildly varying aesthetic sensibilities stood next to one another. From subdued and planar early in the nineteenth century to more active and modeled expressions in the final decades, Baltimore's row houses provide for an active streetscape and dynamic urban view sheds.

10–18 W. Hamilton Street

On 18 June 1816 local architect and builder Robert Cary Long, George Hoffman, and N. Brice lodged a subdivision plan for the block bounded by Cathedral Street on the west, Center Street on the north, Charles Street on the east, and Hamilton Street on the south.[6] The division of the block followed "several conveyances made by John E. Howard to them" on 6 March 1816.[7] A diagram of the division included in the land records show the block split in half by a "lane" twenty feet wide running parallel to Cathedral and Charles streets. The western portion—the half ultimately including Nos. 10–18 Hamilton Street—contained lots 28'-4" x 145'-0" with the short sides oriented to Cathedral Street. The three southern lots were owned, from north to south, by Robert Cary Long, George Hoffman, and again, Robert Cary Long. On 28 June 1817 Long and Hoffman were among those petitioning the Western Precincts Commissioners to "Grade and Pave that part of Hamilton Street from Charles Street to Cathedral Street as soon as Convenient," indicating that active development in that block was moving forward.[8]

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[5]Mary Ellen Hayward and Charles Belfoure, *The Baltimore Rowhouse* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 102, for a diagram and plan of the three-room-deep type with no ell.

[6]Land division, Baltimore City Land Records (hereafter BCLR), W. G. 136, folio 162

[7]Ibid.

[8]*Records of the City of Baltimore, Eastern Precincts Commissioners (1812–1817), Western Precincts Commissioners (1810–1817)*, ed. Wilbur F. Coyle (Baltimore, 1909), 259.

Two years later, in February 1818, Hoffman sold the lot bounded by Long's on the north and south to Long for $2000.[9] Long likely pursued this transaction because he was able to subdivide this portion of the block more effectively by having lots face Hamilton Street. Nos. 10–18 stand on the center five lots of the seven total created by reorienting the subdivision plan for this portion of the block.

Completed sometime around 1822, the six attached houses on found at Nos. 8–18 W. Hamilton Street were designed and constructed by house carpenter-turned-architect Robert Cary Long, Sr. (1770–1833).[10] By the third decade of the nineteenth century, Baltimore was already peppered with a number of significant buildings of his conception and construction. Prior to his rise as an "architect" Long oversaw construction of the Assembly Rooms (1795–1797) and the Baltimore Jail (1799–1802), designed by gentleman amateur Nicholas Rogers.[11] In the years before embarking upon this residential project on Hamilton Street, Long managed to move from "builder" to "architect," authoring accepted designs for the Union Bank (1807), the Medical College (1811–1812), the Holliday Street Theater (1812–1813), the Peale Museum (1813–1814), and St. Paul's Episcopal Church (1814–1817). If not entirely praised for his architectural approaches and inspiration, Long certainly made a significant mark on Baltimore's urban landscape.[12]

The houses on Hamilton Street have been described as a localized distillation of neoclassical row design as exhibited, for example, by Robert Mills's Waterloo Row (1817–1819).[13] Certainly the planar quality of the street face and the tripartite windows reflect Mills's work, however Long did not parrot the work of the better-known architect. Rather, he created original designs within a then-popular form of architectural expression. By employing the use of a true *piano nobile* with the entrance on the ground story and important public rooms on the first floor, Long made use of an early prototype for domestic space arrangement, which remained popular in Baltimore throughout the nineteenth century. In addition to the *piano nobile*, Long's domestic space arrangement included another feature common to Baltimore's row houses during the first-half of the nineteenth century—a ground-floor dining room. Regardless of the principal entry's location, the dining room was often located

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[9]Deed, BCLR, W. G. 152, folio 667. It is uncertain whether Long and Hoffman exchanged any money as part of this transaction as the next transaction listed in the volume (folio 668) found Long selling Hoffman property fronting Hamilton Street for $2000.

[10]Robert L. Alexander, "Baltimore Row Houses of the Early Nineteenth Century," *American Studies* 16 (Fall 1975): 72. Alexander established a tentative *terminus post quem* of 1822 based on Thomas Poppleton's "Plan of the City of Baltimore" published in that year. The plan depicts a uniform row of dependencies behind Cary's Hamilton Street row. These alley structures were never built, signifying a possible scenario whereby the houses were under construction in 1822, with the outbuildings planned and shown on the map, but ultimately not executed.

[11]Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: Maryland* (New York: Abbeville Press, Publishers, 1991), 103.

[12]See Lane 107, 111, for criticism of Long.

[13]Hayward, 33.

on the floor below the parlors. As late as the 1850s, having a dining room on the same story as the principal living areas was enough of an oddity this organization was called a "New York" plan.[14] Given the spaciousness of the room, and its proximity to the cellar kitchen, the large rear room on the ground floor of Nos. 10–18 likely served as the dining room.

Long was apparently satisfied with his design as he was living in one of the houses by 1823 and was still residing there at the time of his 1833 death.[15] The 1830 census recorded a total of eleven people resident in Long's household, including one "free colored female" servant.[16] The house's nine rooms arranged on five floors, including the cellar and attic, would have provided more-than-adequate work and social space for the family of a well-known and prosperous local architect-builder. When considering Baltimore's twentieth-century history, the Mount Vernon neighborhood retained a degree of viability even while large swathes of the city were effectively abandoned in the decades of suburban expansion following World War II. While Nos. 10–18 were not lost to vast redevelopment schemes that appeared elsewhere in the city, by the mid-twentieth century they no longer functioned as single-family houses. For example, when purchased by Elizabeth Avery in 1950, No. 18 W. Hamilton Street had functioned as a boarding house.[17] Avery was part of an early group of people interested not only in preserving the historic architecture of the Mount Vernon area, but also in making the neighborhood their home.[18] In doing so they often conjecturally "restored" houses to their "former glory," and added trappings of modern life including up-to-date bathrooms and kitchens. No. 8's near-total reconstruction likely occurred as part of these revitalization efforts. For Nos. 10–18, despite some questionable and even unfortunate changes when considering historic building fabric, they remain significant survivors from a period where Baltimore became one of the nation's most important cities.

SOURCES:

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[14]For two examples, see "Magnificent Residence," *Baltimore Sun* 6 Sep. 1853: (1) and "Elegant and Extensive Improvements," *Baltimore Sun* 13 Dec. 1850: (1).

[15]Alexander, 72; The Baltimore city directory for 1833 records that Robert Cary Long, "architect and engineer" still lived on "Hamilton E of Cathedral st." *Matchett's Baltimore Directory* (Baltimore, 1833): 117, accessed online, 9 Apr. 2003, http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/.

[16]U. S. Decennial Census of 1830, populations schedules for Baltimore City, 10th ward, 357.

[17]"Gracious Era Recaptured: 150-Year-Old House Restored by Owner," *Baltimore American* 19 Jun. 1955, "Historic Houses, Baltimore, Hamilton Street," vertical files, Maryland Department, Central Library, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland.

[18]Ibid.

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